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*There once was a famous physician
Who bored in his cranium a hole,
With a view to find out the position
And relative size of the soul.*

MARY'S BROTHER.

MRS. OLIPHANT.

HIS coming was naturally regarded with the greatest curiosity and interest throughout the house—which was a very curious household it must be allowed, such a one as is rarely to be met with in ordinary society. The father and head of it—a man in large business in the great town of Liverpool, Mr. John Fazakerley—had married a young widow with one little girl, Mary Mansfield, who was, now that the mother was dead, the mistress of his house, the mother-sister of all the young ones. Mary had been so young at the time of her mother's second marriage, and had taken so kindly to the happy life of her step-father's house, that not one of the Fazakerley children calculated more certainly upon papa's interest in everything concerning them, or was more exclusively and completely his child, than the girl in whose veins there did not run a drop of his blood. That there were some people who objected to this as unnatural, who even attempted to disturb the peace of the house-

hold by insinuating that it was wrong, and that Mary Mansfield was in reality "no relation" to Mr. Fazakerley, was inevitable—as it was also inevitable on the other side that there should be those who considered Mary as a martyr to her sense of duty and her devotion to her mother's memory, and as sacrificing the best of her life to "those children," who were only her step-brothers and sisters after all. On neither side, however, was the peace of the house disturbed by these cavillings. Mary considered herself to have as good a right to papa as any of the family; and the family in general placed itself upon the willing shoulders of the elder sister with all the calm and composure of natural right. It was a large family, reaching down from Edith, who was nearly twenty, into an indefinite crowd of little ones, indistinguishable to any eye which was not to the manner born. I will not attempt to penetrate these lower depths. At the head of the group came, as I have said, Edith; then John, who con-

sidered himself almost a young man, being nearly eighteen, and on the eve of entering his father's office; then Eleanor, commonly called Nelly, who had not yet attained to any independence of mind, but copied Edith almost slavishly, though an occasional deflection of influence from Mary sometimes made this little girl execute an unintentional jump of variation between one path and another; then there came—but why should I enter upon that forest of names? Only Miss Yonge can keep so many threads in her hand and make the reader to see the individuality of each. I shrink from such a task. The three at the top are enough if not already over much.

It is scarcely necessary to say that these three entertained, along with the most perfect love and trust, an occasional gleam of affectionate contempt for Mary, as they might have done for their mother, on account of her old-fashionedness and antiquated ways of thinking as well as acting. Truth compels me to admit that Mary was thirty, an age when a woman is in her finest and noblest bloom: but which it has become the conventional custom to regard as the beginning of decadence—why it is difficult to say. Mary was thirty, and felt, if she did not look, more; for the cares of a family are wearing, though full of pleasure to those for whom that office is intended. To think of all the winter things and all the summer things; to judge when a nursery ailment will yield to nursery remedies, and when the doctor must be sent for; and above all to arbitrate in cases of internal conflict, to repress what is bad in the little commonwealth and encourage what is good—is an occupation full of anxieties, and which rapidly ripens and fills the mind with experience. I do not think that she looked older than her age; but many people thought so, and she was called an old maid and other (intentionally) opprobrious epithets, and had ten or more years added to her age by careless persons who neither knew nor cared anything about Mary. She went on quite serenely all the same upon the even tenor of her way. Nothing ever had happened, nothing ever would happen to Mary, even her brothers and sisters were sure, except what was happening every day.

There was one point, however, in respect to which Mary was remarkable in her family, and which was the one circumstance that might be called mysterious if not romantic in her lot. She had a brother

whom nobody had ever seen, who was her brother all to herself, and not the brother of the rest. This was made possible by the fact that her father too, Mr. Mansfield, had been married before he married Mary's mother, and was the father of a boy who went to India very early, and was totally unknown to any of the Fazakerleys. Nothing was more difficult than to get into the understanding of these young persons the extraordinary, the appalling fact that Mary had a brother who was actually "no relation" to them. There was his portrait in her room, one of the pictures they had all known all their lives; and he was her brother, but one who was "no relation" to her other brothers and sisters. It was a sufficiently curious position indeed, however regarded, but not unknown among families with a proclivity towards marrying. It was, as I have said, the only link of the family with the mysterious and unseen. Everything about the Fazakerleys was well-known and evident—their fathers and grandfathers had carried on that great business in Liverpool since almost the beginning of the world. They had not indeed been merchant princes, but they had been exceedingly well-to-do, and able to provide for their children from generation to generation. The young people had cousins all over the country, in all sorts of creditable situations. They had an uncle who was a dean, and a great-uncle who had been an Under-Secretary of State, and several relations in Parliament. Had there been a *Debrett* for the Liverpool merchant families—which indeed would be an extremely interesting volume—in Liverpool, they would have figured there in all their branches, as they did in the unwritten *Debrett* of local memory. Mary Mansfield was herself a link with the unknown, for it was very dimly understood who her father was; but Ernest Mansfield, her brother, who was no relation to the Fazakerleys, he was mystery itself, and a whole invisible world.

He was a Civil Servant in India, attended by a crowd of black men in white dresses, governing, or helping to govern, countries of unknown magnificence, and to put his foot upon necks which glimmered with the sheen of priceless jewels, uncut emeralds of the size of eggs, and barbaric pearl and gold beyond counting; and nobody had ever seen him or knew anything about him. The portrait in Mary's room was of a bland young man in smiles and white clothes: and many successive pictures

represented him in different aspects, sometimes seated in his verandah, sometimes with a shooting party, sometimes among a crowd of helmeted white figures on an Indian cricket-ground, sometimes in his court trying natives for their lives—but always bland, and always unlike anybody else. The very youngest of the children picked out that spare form from among the groups and said, "Mary's brudder," from its earliest possibility of talk. And the speculations among the elder ones as to what "Mary's brother" would do when he came home were endless. He had not been home since before the recollection of any of them. Edith indeed declared that she recollected him, but as she could not have been more than five years old at the time, nobody believed in her reminiscences. When he came home, if he ever came home, where would be the home to which Mary's brother would go? He had very few relations, it was said, and no home at all that could be called a home, unless— Would he come *here*? the young ones asked with bated breath. Wouldn't Mary's home be his home naturally, as he was her brother? or, if not that, what else would he do? Mary had a great many Indian ornaments and curiosities sent her by her brother; there were Indian things in ivory, in ebony, or whatever that black wood is called which Indian workmen carve so curiously, all over the house, presents to his sister's family; almost every one of the children had received presents from him—and Edith above all. There was always something for Edith when Mary received one of those delightful boxes, the arrival of which excited the whole household. She had Indian muslins, and Trichinopoly chains, and filigree work in gold, and embroideries of every description.

These gifts coming out of the unseen had greatly affected Edith's imagination, though no one knew of it. Mary's brother was "no relation." Nothing had ever been more completely impressed upon the imagination of the family than this. It was permitted to build any castle in the air about him, to weave any tissue of dreams, notwithstanding that it would have been an absurd punctilio to refuse his presents had any one ever thought of doing so. And Edith, from the earliest moment when a girl begins to see for herself an independent fate, and to connect that fate with the advent of the hero whom even Girton has not abolished, had taken Mary's brother for the object of those early dreams which are more

delightful in their sweet folly than anything actual. A thousand times had she seen him in her imagination come "home"; sometimes with delightful familiarity, as one who knew the household by heart, and who had already selected and set apart herself in the midst of it, as she had silently and secretly selected him; sometimes quite in another aspect—as a stranger, confused by the new family into which he was introduced, almost hostile to it, till subjugated by the maiden heroine whose charm he would struggle against ineffectually as long as he could. Curiously enough it was almost in this last point of view that she took most pleasure. He would feel himself "out of it" at first; he might not take to the boys; he might dislike to see Mary, *his* sister, at everybody's beck and call, attending to papa, looking after the little ones as if nobody but they had any share in her. Many a time had Edith seen in imagination the look of annoyance on that brown face of the photograph, the impatience, the sense of being a stranger—all melting away by degrees under the attraction of her own presence. She had felt that he would resist the influence, and she preferred that he should resist, knowing all the time that his resistance would be in vain. This furnished her with a romance of her own which she kept weaving out day by day. Half her young life was wound in this fairy web. When Mary's brother was mentioned suddenly it brought a little rush of blood to Edith's cheek, her heart began to beat, a soft sense of triumph, of sweet ownership, stole over her. Mary's brother indeed! The time would come when he would be known by quite another name. Mary flattered herself that she knew every thought of her young sister's heart; but she had no more idea of this than if Edith and she had been complete strangers. Nor had Nelly, who was so near Edith in age, and shared her room, and her walks, and every detail of her life. These two were on each side of her, hemming her in from the world, sharing everything with her; but neither of them had the faintest notion of what had come by degrees to be the one great pre-occupation of Edith's foolish little visionary being: though indeed she was not visionary at all, but a girl like other girls, full of her dances and her tennis, and not unwilling to be in much request, and always provided with partners for both functions—*en attendant* the other partner of whom nobody knew.

And then when the letter came announcing, actually and without any doubt about it, that much talked-of return! Mary's brother was coming home—he was coming to Fairfield (which I have omitted to say was the name of Mr. Fazakerley's house), apparently as if that were the most natural thing in the world. His letter to Mary giving this great news, which she read out to the entire family at the breakfast-table, interrupted at every line by outcries and comments, was accompanied by a letter to papa, a very nice letter, Mr. Fazakerley said, but which he did not read aloud.

"Of course, my dear, your brother must come here," that excellent papa said. "Tell him that I take it for granted that Fairfield shall be his home and head-quarters while he is in England—and as for the friend who is with him, we shall be delighted to see him. I hope we have room enough always for Mary's brother, and any one he may choose to bring."

"His friend?" said Mary, with much astonishment; "he does not say anything to me of any friend." And it was remembered afterwards that Mary fixed her eyes upon papa's face as if to read something more in it, and that the colour in her own fluttered from red to white; but papa on his part gave no response nor looked as if he were aware of anything more than met the eye.

"I see," he replied, looking at the letter again, "that he only says he may have a friend with him for whom he would ask a night's lodging. Of course he shall have a night's lodging if he were the Maharajah himself, or the ship's cook, which is stretching as far as I can think of. Send a note to Suez to tell him so, Mary; and that we are all looking forward to seeing him as to a son coming home."

"Dear father," said Mary, with that changing colour and tears in her eyes. And what more natural than that Mary should change colour and even cry for joy at the thought of seeing her brother from whom she had been parted so long? Edith was the one who was strange—she was even heartless, Nelly thought—taking up the newspaper and reading it as if she were more interested in stupid politics than in Mary's brother who was coming home.

This wonderful return, so much thought of, so much looked forward to, took place on a summer evening when it was nearly dark, and all the family

were assembled in the drawing-room breathless with expectation. Of course the train that day was late, and Mary had just given orders in a doleful voice that dinner was not to be kept waiting any longer, when the door of the drawing-room was flung open, and the group of figures already there seemed suddenly to swell into a crowd, with others coming in. Others! there might have been half a dozen for anything you could tell in the commotion. A voice cried, "Which is Mary?" and there was a rush, and then from Mr. Fazakerley an exclamation, "There's no light to see him by!" The rest stood round, drawing instinctively towards that central group, Edith alone holding back, but all confused with the twilight and their ignorance of each other. I am almost ashamed to say, for I know it is vulgar, that the room was lighted with gas. John Fazakerley, who always had matches in his pocket, rushed at the nearest bracket and struck one, which flared up, throwing the most curious small momentary light on the scene, and then went out tragically, leaving the darkness deeper than before. This incident produced a laugh, but also the strange vibration of a stifled, startled cry, which seemed the very voice of the brief illumination and of the excitement. It was chiefly from Mary, who saw through that momentary gleam a face which she did not expect to see, as well as one which she did expect, and could not keep back the cry of agitation, surprise, and other emotions; but partly, a very little, from Edith, startled beyond measure by feeling both her hands seized in a hearty, cheerful grasp, a large, jolly voice in her ear saying, "Edith, I'm certain!" and then, good heavens! the sweep of a big moustache upon her cheek. As this extraordinary thing happened, John's second match struck successfully, and the light suddenly leapt up in the crystal globe, making everything visible. A long gray man stooping over her was what Edith saw, laughing (the monster!), saying, "Not too big, I hope, to give a kiss to Mary's brother—that's more like an uncle;" and then with a pressure of her two hands that hurt, dropping them and going on to Nelly. Edith felt as if it was not blood but fire that ran in her veins, a sudden flame of rage and trouble seemed to envelop her. Going on to Nelly! making the round! hoping she was not too big! She threaded her way through the family crowd she did not know how, and darted out of

the great open window into the cool darkness of the garden. Oh, dreadful downfall! Oh, horrid prose after all her poetry! Was this what her delicate dreams, her romantic visions, her castles in the air had come to? A tall monster of a man who kissed her, and laughed and hoped she was not too big!—and then went on to the rest! Edith flew through the darkest part of the shrubbery, and rushed into the gloom of the great cedar tree, and pressed her burning cheek against its rough bark to do away with the sensation of that moustache. 'Too big!—Edith, who was twenty, who might have married had she chosen, had she not been so silly as to think—! Oh, dreadful, dreadful disillusion, downfall, destruction of all the soft, delightful fabric of her dreams! Too big! The girl could not contain herself in her fury and humiliation. She almost scratched her cheek against the tree, she stamped her foot upon the gravel, hot tears rushed to her eyes: this the hero of her dreams, the possible prince of a girl's romance, the ideal man of all men! Mary's brother was none of these things. He was a connection, a kind of relation who thought nothing about Edith but whether she was too big to be kissed—too big. Heaven and earth! If he had even said too old she could have forgiven him—but too big!—as if she were a child!

She stayed in the shadow of the shrubberies till the dressing-bell pealed through the house and out into the garden with a sound of hurry and jubilation which increased the rage in Edith's breast. The very bell seemed to say, "Make haste! make haste! Mary's brother must not be kept waiting for his dinner." Edith did not obey that call. She held back until the very last moment, until a vision of papa's face (who hated any one to be late) came before her, and forced her into the house to prepare for dinner. The drawing-room had been vacated by the crowd some time before, and Edith felt it a little surprising that the one gas-bracket which John had lighted was still all the light in the room. But she was too much flurried and excited to think of that or any other detail, rapt in her anger and dismay above all ordinary circumstances. She went in by the window as she had come, looking like a ghost in her white morning dress against the dark background of the garden and the bit of evening sky, very certain that the room was empty, and that nobody could see her as she stole through.

But in this Edith was deceived. The room was not empty. There was a movement at the other end, and two people rose hurriedly who had been sitting so close to each other that at first they appeared but one. Oh! the brother, no doubt, who had so much to say to Mary that he could not tear himself away, had not even the grace to feel that he ought to get ready in time for dinner, which was the one thing papa insisted on!

"Oh," cried Edith, in her anger. "Don't let me disturb you!" being half pleased, though wholly indignant, that the very first night, when he was the merest stranger, this man should show what manner of man he was by annoying papa.

"Oh, stop a moment, Edith!" cried Mary. Mary was as red as a rose as she came forward into that one serenely shining inquisitive light. She had grown in a moment ever so much younger, younger than her little sister. Her eyes were so bright, so dewy, so deprecating that the angry girl gazed at her amazed. And she was followed by a dark figure, who was not certainly the man who had given Edith that insulting, brotherly, uncle-y kiss. Another man! And who was this?—not Mary's brother it appeared; for what Mary said was in a very faltering yet happy voice: "Edith, dear, this is your new brother. Oh, bid him welcome, darling, for my sake—"

"I have spoken to Mr. Mansfield already," cried Edith with great dignity but much wonder in her throbbing heart; "and of course he is welcome; but he is not my new brother. We have always been told he was no relation—"

What Mary said and did was more wonderful still, and heartless beyond the power of words to say. She flung over the brother, the other, the Indian man, as if he had never existed. She put her hand upon this second stranger's arm and drew him forward, and she laughed, though it was a very tremulous sort of laugh.

"This is not my brother," she said. "He is going to be something else—to me. But, Edie, he will be *your* brother whatever any one may say."

"I am Mary's husband—that is to be," said this other man.

He took Edith's hand, and drew close to her as if he meant to kiss her too. But that was more than flesh and blood could bear. Edith drew her hand from him as if his touch burned her. She gave utterance to a frightened angry "Oh!" of disapproval.

"I don't understand what you mean," she cried. "Have you been deceiving us all, all this time—has there never been a brother at all, but only a man you were going to marry? Oh, Mary! Oh, Mary! and we who believed in you so!"

And the girl flew out of the room and up-stairs, indignant, angry, wounded beyond description. Not any brother at all!—no one to give the slightest meaning to all those silly fancies of hers!—no Ernest Mansfield, even a disappointing one, but only a strange man whom Mary was going to marry—Mary, so old, the housekeeper, the caretaker, who never seemed to think of any such thing!

"He shall never be my brother—never, never!" said Edith fiercely to herself.

She forgot her wrath against the man who had kissed her, even forgot and did not stop to inquire who could be that other man. The only thing that gave her a little malignant pleasure was the thought that these two, whom she could hear following her up-stairs, would be terribly late for dinner, and call forth the wrath of papa.

Nelly turned to meet her, all dressed and ready, as she darted into their common room.

"Oh, Edie!" she cried, dancing with excitement, "what a thing to happen! Mary! who ever thought of Mary! You might have been married, it would have been natural; but Mary! And it appears that's all Ernest's doing too; he's the man that sets everything right."

Edith stood desperate in the middle of the room. "I know nothing about it," she said, with her hands clenched and her teeth set; "and I don't want to know anything about it. Who is Mary going to marry? How dares she to bring men here we have never heard of before? And who's Ernest, and how does he dare—dare! I know nothing about it—and I don't want to know anything about it," Edith cried.

But yet even in the midst of her wrath there came a little softening into her heart towards the tall gray man who was still after all Mary's brother. It had been intolerable to believe, after all her thoughts, that he had no existence at all. And I need not say that Nelly's desire to tell being far more genuine than her sister's determination not to hear, the tale was poured forth while Edith made her hasty toilette, all the time taking a secret satisfaction in the thought that Mary, who was so

orderly and never did anything in a hurry, must be late for dinner! It was not a very serious way of putting her in the wrong; but still it was a satisfaction. It appeared from Nelly's tale that Mary had met her lover when absent from Fairfield on a long visit "in mamma's time"—that she had been engaged to him with the consent of her parents. And then mamma had died, the marriage had been put off: and when some misunderstanding arose between the lovers, Mary's devotion to her family had helped to make the breach wider, and at last the engagement had been brought to an end. Ernest had found the man in India years after, still longing for the bride who he believed had thrown him over. And it had been a little plot between him and Mr. Fazakerley to bring the despairing lover back thus suddenly to Mary's feet.

"It is a romance—quite a romance," Nelly cried with triumph, delighted to have something of the kind in the family, not the tame wooings and marryings of ordinary life.

Edith listened, putting up her hair, tying her ribbons, fastening her dress, with many a thought. She too had meant to have a romance in her life. There was something bewildering after all, confusing, almost laughable when you came to think of it in one way, almost insupportable when you thought of it in another—to see the Romance come, filling the house with excitement, but not for the girl to whom it was natural, not to the young seer of visions and dreamer of dreams; to Mary—Mary of all people in the world, the half-mother of the children, papa's housekeeper—Mary, who everybody believed would never marry at all!

"Oh, Edie," cried her little sister, "are you really going down without one thing on that Ernest sent you?—the first night he has come home!"

"If you mean Mr. Mansfield," cried Edith with dignity, "I never should have taken any of his presents if I could have helped it, and I am not going to put any of them on. And he hasn't come home. This new man may be my brother-in-law, I can't help that; but Mary's brother is not my brother, and never shall be. I am not going to call him by his Christian name."

"Oh, Edie!" Nelly cried, remonstrant.

But perhaps things turned out better than might have been expected, for next day Edith, much ashamed of herself, came down with a string of Indian bangles and a Trichinopoly chain.